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AUTHOR Casares, Pablo; And Others
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ABSTRACT

An operational instrument was designed to approach the tasks of curricular planning and design of university programs in communication in Mexico, or elsewhere in the Third World. The instrument was designed by the Mexican team of advisors at the Workshop-Seminar on Curriculum Planning, held in Villa de Leyva, Colombia, in May of 1987. It was used in 10 workshops on curricular planning and design held in different cities of Mexico, in which over 60 people involved in education for communication professionals participated. The instrument proposes a conceptual structure of curricular design set within a double-entry chart: one for dimensions and one for domains, which will allow for the definition and operation of its elements in variables and indicators. The concept of dimensions of curricular design is understood as a complex of realities or given situations which determine an educational practice and which should be considered in the process of review and design. These dimensions are: institutionality, profession, object of study, and resources and subjects. Domains are those elements of every curriculum whose definition is the result of decisions taken by the academic unit that designs and carries out an educational experience. Domains include: goals, strategies and policies, academic structure, plans and programs, curricular administration, and evaluation. Indicators are empirically observable elements that allow for the knowledge of variables and abstract concepts. The indicators of dimensions and domains of curricular design are exposed as general questions. (MG)

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DIMENSIONS AND VARIABLES OF CURRICULAR DESIGN
FOR COMMUNICATION SCHOOLS IN
LATIN AMERICA

by

Pablo Casares
Javier Esteinou
Javier Mier
Raul Fuentes
Carlos Luna
Luis Nunez
Beatriz Solis

Mexico, 1988
Universidad Iberoamericana
Dept. of Communication

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1.- INTRODUCTION.

The purpose of this paper is to serve as an operational instrument to approach the tasks of curricular planning and design of university programs in communication in Mexico, or in the third world.

The basic structure of the instrument was developed by the Mexican team of advisers at the Workshop-Seminar on Curricular Planning, held in Villa de Leyva, Colombia, in May of 1987. It was used in ten Workshops on curricular planning and design, in different cities of Mexico and with the participation of over 60 people involved in education for communication professionals.

Considering the differences and diverse characteristics of the schools of communication in México and their un-renounceable autonomy in curriculum activities, the instrument was to be taken only as a working guide whose utility and consequent specifications were evaluated by the institutions themselves within the framework of the regional workshops and from the perspective of the needs formulated by each school.

The instrument proposes a conceptual structure of curricular design set for within a double-entry chart: one for dimensions, on the one hand and for domains on the other; which will allow for the definition and operation of its elements in variables and indicators.

2.- DIMENSIONS AND DOMAINS: DOUBLE ENTRY CHART.

Reference Framework		DOMAINS					
-Foundation		GOALS	STRATEGIES & POLICIES	ACADEMIC STRUCTURE	PLANS & PROGRAMS	CURRIC. ADMTION.	EVALUAT ION
-History							
-Diagnosis							
-Prospective							
D I M E N S I O N S	INSTITUTIONALITY						
	PROFESSION						
	OBJECT OF STUDY						
	RESOURCES						
	SUBJECTS						

3. REFERENCE FRAMEWORK.

The reference framework is an accumulation of information that serves as the basis to initiate the work of curricular review and design. In substance, the reference framework attempts to rebuild the basic positions (foundation), significant trajectory (history), current situation (diagnosis), and future projection (prospective) of the institution or academic unit, in respect to

curriculum dimensions and the way domains have been considered and performed.

The reference framework nourishes mainly on constant evaluation of educational practice. In this sense, it is at the same time input and output.

4. DIMENSIONS.

The concept of dimensions of curricular design is understood as a complex of "realities" or given situations which determine an educational practice (not prescribed by the academic unit, and thus very hard to change), and which therefore should be necessarily considered in the process of curricular review and design. These three dimensions are:

4.1 Institutional.

Body of juridical, institutional, and organizational determinants that affect curricular operation.

E.g. The institutions incorporated to the National Autonomous University of México must submit their programs of study for its approval; other autonomous universities of different states do not need to do so. There is still another example, educational institutions directly linked to private industry groups can hardly propose or explicitly promote values running counter to the philosophy of free enterprise.

4.2 Profession.

Complex of activities located within certain social practices, and socially regulated which tend to fulfill the production, and reproduction of social structure, and the institution's perception of these.

E.g. Advertising can be considered as an sphere of professional performance in the field of communication, supposes the carrying out of certain activities or patterns of operation (identification of client's needs to achieve his market objectives: setting a media strategy, contracting time and space in the media, etc). These activities can also be considered within an ampler economic practice (production and exchange of goods) which satisfy the needs of a sector of the social structure (capital accumulation).

4.3 Object of study.

Set of theoretical points of view and methodological approaches that constitute the state of knowledge of given specific objects or spaces of social practice.

This state of knowledge influences directly in the way a profession is represented and practiced in its insertion within social structure. In this sense, the progress of knowledge is not independent of concrete social purposes.

E.g. The rise and initial development of the "Science of Communication" in the United States were preponderantly aimed

at the offering of representations and explanations to handle consumer, and voters behavior, as well as public opinion.

Other theoretical developments such as those practiced along the lines of participative communication in some Latin American countries offer different explanations of communication, and are useful for other types of professional practices and social purposes, such as social organization for development.

4.4 Resources and Subjects.

Resources embrace financial, space, equipment and human means available for the academic unit, as well as services provided by the institution. Even though there is a possibility for the academic unit to enlarge or improve the resources it has access to, we consider it as a dimension because this usually has very short limits, and is always dependent on norms, regulations and procedures of the institution.

Of course, the most important resource an academic unit has is its human resources. The subjects are the actors who intervene directly in curricular operations. The fundamental actors are students, and professors or academic personnel in general. Taking into account of real subjects in curricular review and design is indispensable since it is they on whom the success or failure of an educational project depends.

E.g. The characteristics of students who ordinarily enter private universities which charges high tuition are different from those of students entering public universities which are free. The differences in socioeconomic status are usually associated with such variables as study time availability, economic means to secure books, equipment and material, as well as expectation of professional work, etc.

5.- DOMAINS.

If dimensions are factors that frame and "determine" educational practices, domains are those elements of every curriculum whose definition is the result of decisions taken by the academic unit that designs and carries out an educational experience. In this sense, domains constitute particularities of each curriculum; its handling and formulations which normally fall within educational technology.

5.1 Goals.

Purposes and general objectives of educational practice referred to knowledge, skills and abilities, values and attitudes whose achievement is designed to foster in the subjects of educational process, in reference to the type of change or reinforcement the educational unit expects to impact on social practices, through the professional work of graduates of the program.

The goals are normally expressed as "professional profiles", objectives of social impact, etc.

5.2 Strategies and policies.

A strategy in the concrete context of curricular design is a basic educational model which is adopted as the best option for the achievement of the goals in conjunction with the resources, limitations and potential of the institution. An educational model implies a series of theoretical and practical suppositions on education and on methodologies that guide the formative process. Every educational model, from the moment in which it defines certain types of interaction among the subjects and concrete ways of approaching the objects of study and transformation, is already predictive of specific professional practices; in this sense the educational models have also a political dimension.

A formative process that fosters the linkage of theory and practice, parting from the gathering and systematization of work experiences is an educational strategy which differs, for instance, from that of a system centered on the transmission of information.

Policies are criteria that guide decision making in congruence with assumed strategies. Students selection criteria, which is appropriate to a given type of educational model, is an example of policy.

5.3 Academic Structure.

Organization and interrelation of elements that structure the educational process. The academic structure defines in its most general traits, the units, areas, situations, and conditions for learning in a program.

An academic structure, for example, can be conformed by areas (major, minor, complementary or of specialization, etc.) or in another case, can be thought of as modules or units of work defined in terms of the objects of study and transformation.

5.4 Plans and Programs.

The plans and programs are the operational specification of the academic structure and strategy. They organize particular objectives, contents, activities, etc. of the work units (courses, subjects, modules, workshops, etc.) and their synchronic and diachronic relationships. The plans and programs are what is normally known as a plan of study.

5.5 Curricular Administration.

Curricular administration is a body of administrative activities (course registrations, registration regulations, teacher supervision, etc.) that guarantees the adequate

functioning of a curriculum. Curricular administration is encompassed in the general policies.

5.6 Evaluation.

It is the analysis of the products and the results of the educational practice and the processes involved, as well as its comparison with the goals and other elements of the planned curriculum.

Evaluations can assume diverse attainments or scopes (general evaluations, subject evaluations, etc.) and distinct rhythms or moments (formative, partial, or total evaluations, etc.).

Evaluations are key instruments so as to know what actually happens in reference to what is expected to happen, that being indispensable to effect any adjustment or change in curricular operation.

6. INDICATORS.

In this part of the instrument, some of the indicators of the dimensions and domains of curricular design are presented. Indicators are empirically observable elements that allow the knowledge of variables and abstract concepts.

For purposes of clarity and practical utility, the indicators of dimensions and domains of curricular design are exposed as general questions, without any attempt of being exhaustive.

6.1 Dimensions.

6.1.1 Profession.

- What are the professional practices of communication in terms of activities or patterns of operation in use in the locality or region that is intended to be served?
- To what social practices do they respond?
- What models of professional practice emerge in the light of economic, political and cultural changes in the locality, region, or country? What models are vanishing?
- What needs and social projects do dominant, transitional, and emerging professional practices serve?

6.1.2 Object of study.

- How can the theoretical field of communications, in terms of objects, theoretical points of view, and methodological approaches be characterized?
- How does each of the points of view and approaches understand and visualizes communication?
- What types of professional practices and social projects are explicitly or implicitly envisioned in the points of view, and approaches?

6.1.3 Institutionalilty.

-What are the external and internal juridical limits upon the institution that regulates its educational activity? What opportunities for action do they allow?

-What implicit or explicit values does the institution profess? What actions or projects are proscribed or prescribed to it?

-What internal or external groups affect the functioning of the institution and in reference to which projects? What support and obstacles can be found in those groups, in conjunction with a given curricular orientation?

-What is the academic and organizational structure of the institution? What lines of authority and opportunities for autonomy are there?

-What academic entities does the academic unit that teaches the program have links with? What opportunities for action do these links allow?

6.1.4 Subjects.

-What kind of candidates and students does the field of study have in reference to such variables as age, sex, socioeconomic level, background, etc.?

-What support and obstacles can this composite of factors create in terms of curricular operation?

-What perspective of future professional practices can candidates and students expect? What social price are these perspectives subject to?

-What is the configuration of academic personnel in terms of university degrees, areas of competence, availability, interests, etc.?

-What potential and what limitations does the configuration of academic staff represent as it concerns the functioning of a given academic project?

6.2 Domains.

6.2.1 Goals.

-What type of professional practice is it desired to be fostered?

-What kinds of practices and projects is the professional practice linked to?

-What characteristics should the graduating students have in terms of learning objectives (knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc.) in order to practice a profession and participate in a particular social project?

6.2.2 Strategies and Policies.

-What educational model is the most adequate to achieve the goals?

-What political, communicative, and professional conception is implicit or explicit in the model?

-What norms and general policies should be established in order for the strategy to work?

-Are these policies viable and operational?

6.2.3 Academic Structure.

- What academic structure is the most adequate for the strategy to work and for the achievement of the goals? Is it by areas, departments, modules, etc.?
- Is it viable in terms of the institution, object of study and subjects?
- How should the elements be related so that the structure is logical and coherent?

6.2.4 Plans and Programs.

- What units of work or situations materialize and specify the academic structure, academic subjects, workshops, modules, etc.?
- How should each unit be organized internally?
- What objectives, content, activities, etc. should it include?
- Is the relationship of the units coherent, synchronically and diachronically?
- Are the programs of study viable in reference to the institution, the object, and the subjects?

6.2.5 Curricular Administration.

- Which are the administrative instruments (regulations, procedures, norms, etc.) more appropriate in relation to

the strategy, academic structure and the plans and programs.

- Are they congruent with the general policies?
- Do they support or obstruct the curricular operation?
- Are they viable in relation with the institutionality and the subjects?

6.2.6 Evaluation.

- What should be the mechanisms of curricular evaluation at various phases of achievement and moments?
- Do they have validity? Do they measure what they should?
- How are evaluations assumed? What uses do they have? What feedback do they provide for curricular functioning in general?